

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 0988

EXDIS

FOR DAS LUERS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: RO, US, CZ
SUBJECT: CZECHOSLOVAKIA-STILL IN A SOVIET STRAIGHTJACKET

REF A. STATE 087032, B. BUCHAREST 1993

1. LIKE OTHER ADDRESSEES, WE READ BUCHAREST'S PROVOCATIVE
OVERVIEW WITH GREAT INTEREST. HOWEVER, WE CONSIDERED THAT BOTH
CEAUSESCU'S BRAND OF NATIONAL COMMUNISM AND HIS ROLE IN
WORLD AFFAIRS WERE OF TOO LITTLE DIRECT RELEVANCE TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA
TO CALL FOR AN IN-DEPTH COMMENTARY FROM PRAGUE ON THE OCCASION
OF THE ROMANIAN LEADER'S JUST COMPLETED VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES.
ON THE OTHER HAND, WE HOPE THE FOLLOWING THOUGHTS MAY BE
USEFUL IN EUR'S SCHEDULED APRIL 18
DISCUSSION NOTED IN REFTEL A.

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2. WE SUSPECT THAT MANY ORDINARY CZECHOSLOVAKS STILL RECALL
APPRECIATIVELY CEAUSESCU'S COURAGEOUS AUGUST 21, 1968
PUBLIC DENUNCIATION OF THE SOVIET-DIRECTED ARMED INTERVENTION IN
PRAGUE. BUT FOR THEM, AND ALL THE MORE SO FOR THE CURRENT HUSAK
LEADERSHIP, CEAUSESCU'S POLICIES ARE ALMOST ENTIRELY OUT OF
SYNCHRONIZATION WITH CZECHOSLOVAK ASPIRATIONS. THE DESIRE HERE IS
NOT TO CARVE OUT A ROMANIAN-STYLE RIGIDLY TOTALITARIAN COURSE

ON INTERNAL MATTERS, WHILE MANEUVERING INDEPENDENTLY ON FOREIGN POLICY. INSTEAD, IN OUR JUDGEMENT, HUSAK'S GOAL IS TO EVOLVE GRADUALLY TOWARD A MORE LIBERAL INTERNAL REGIME, ALONG LINES OF WHAT KADAR HAS DONE IN HUNGARY DURING THE 22 YEARS SINCE HIS 1956 ASCENDANCY, WHILE FULLY SUPPORTING SOVIET EXTERNAL OBJECTIVES. ANY LIBERALIZING TENDANCIES MUST FULLY SUPPORT SOVIET EXTERNAL OBJECTIVES AND IN NO WAY BE SEEN TO ALIENATE THE SOVIET REGIME.

3. SINCE 1948 THE CZECHOSLOVAKS, EVEN DURING THE DUBCEK PERIOD, HAVE SEEN THEIR GEOGRAPHICAL SITUATION, ON THE FRONT LINE OF CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE SLOVIC AND GERMANIC PEOPLES, DICTATING FULL SUPPORT FOR SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY. UNDER HUSAK, THE CZECHOSLOVAKS

HAVE GONE TO EXTRAORDINARY LENGTHS TO ACCOMODATE MOSCOW'S DESIRES FOR "INTEGRATION"--A CONCEPT THAT IS ANETHEMA TO CEAUSESCU--WITHIN THE WARSAW PACT AND CEMA. AND ON ALL OTHER EXTERNAL ISSUES, WHETHER RELATED TO COMMUNIST WORLD PROBLEMS (E.G. CHINA) OR NON-COMMUNIST, (INCLUDING RELATIONS WITH THE US) THE CZECHS ARE CONTENT TO FOLLOW THE LEAD OF MOSCOW. WITH THE EROSION OF CONFORMITY IN THE ONCE MONOLITHIC SOVIET CAMP, CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S FOREIGN POLICY IS, IN FACT, MOST STRIKING FOR THE PERSISTENCE OF ITS FIDELITY TO THE KREMLIN.

4. FOR THIS PRESENT YEAR OF KEY ANNIVERSARIES--THE 30TH SINCE THE COMMUNIST TAKEOVER OF FEBRUARY 1948 AND 10TH SINCE CONFIDENTIAL

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THE SOVIET INVASION OF 1968--THE PARTY LEADERSHIP HAS BEEN EMPHASIZING ITS OWN UNITY, ITS EXTERNAL SOLIDARITY WITH THE SOVIET UNION, AND ITS FIRM COMMITMENT TO CONTINUITY OF THE INTERNAL CENTRALIZATION PURSUED SINCE THE FALL OF DUBCEK. THESE WERE THE MAIN THEMES, FOR EXAMPLE, OF HUSAK'S MARCH 15 SPEECH TO A PLENARY SESSION OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE. EVEN DURING HUSAK'S APRIL 10-13 VISIT TO THE FRG, HIS FIRST TO THE WEST SINCE THE EVENTS IN 1968, LOCAL MEDIA APPEARED MOST ANXIOUS TO REPORT ON BREZHNEV'S AWARDED OF MEDALS TO COSMONAUT REMEK AND TO OTHER EXAMPLES OF CZECHOSLOVAK TIES WITH THE USSR.

5. AS FOR THE POST-TITO ERA, WE THINK THE ISSUE OF GREATEST SIGNIFICANCE FOR CZECHOSLOVAKS WOULD BE THE GENERAL IMPACT OF POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN THE BALKANS ON THE EAST-WEST POWER BALANCE IN EUROPE. BUT THIS QUESTION MAY SEEM OF LIMITED DIRECT RELEVANCE TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S SITUATION IN CENTRAL EUROPE. WE THINK CZECHOSLOVAKS ARE MORE INTRIGUED WITH POTENTIAL CHANGES THAT COULD TAKE SHAPE IN THE POST-BREZHNEV ERA. FOR IT IS BREZHNEV AND HIS COMRADES WHO PUT HUSAK, BILAK, INDRA AND COMPANY INTO POWER AFTER DUBCEK'S OUSTER, AND THE CZECHOSLOVAKS DOUBTLESS WONDER WHETHER BREZHNEV'S SUCCESSORS MIGHT AT LEAST GRADUALLY INTRODUCE A NEW LEADERSHIP TEAM IN

PRAGUE. WE BELIEVE ANY CHANGES WOULD LIKELY BE GRADUAL, SINCE WE ASSUME MOSCOW WILL PLACE A CONTINUING HIGH PRIORITY ON STABILITY IN PRAGUE FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. AND WE SEE LITTLE OR NO PREDILECTION ON THE PART OF LEADING CZECHOSLOVAKS TO CHALLENGE MOSCOW'S HEGEMONY.

6. IN THIS SITUATION, UNITED STATES POLICIES WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE MINIMAL IMPACT HERE UNTIL A SETTLEMENT IS FINALLY REACHED ON THE POSTWAR CLAIMS/GOLD PROBLEM. ONLY THEN CAN WE BEGIN TO MOVE BEYOND OUR CURRENT HOLDING PATTERN TOWARD A BUILD-UP OF TRADE, THOUGH NEGOTIATION OF A TRADE AGREEMENT WITH AN MFN CLAUSE, AND A GENERAL STRENGTHENING OF BILATERAL TIES OF ALL KINDS. THE PRESENT CONTRAST BETWEEN OUR RELATIONS WITH ROMANIA, ON ONE HAND, AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA ON THE OTHER IS VIVIDLY CONFIDENTIAL

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REFLECTED IN THE FACT THAT PRESIDENT CEAUSESCU COULD HAVE A HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES LAST WEEK, WHILE IT CURRENTLY REMAINS IMPOSSIBLE--MAINLY BECAUSE OF OUR DIFFERENCES WITH PRAGUE OVER HUMAN RIGHTS--TO SCHEDULE A ROUTINE VISIT TO WASHINGTON BY A CZECHOSLOVAK DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER.
BYRNE

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